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ARTICLES:

- (1) Ruling LDP, New Komeito agree on definition of "patriotism"; LDP aims to resolve the issue under Koizumi cabinet, New Komeito avoids adverse impact on Upper House election

TOKYO SHIMBIN (Page 2) (Slightly abridged)
April 13, 2006

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its coalition partner New Komeito yesterday put an end to a debate over how to describe "patriotism" after discussions that lasted for about three years. The LDP wanted to resolve this thorny issue under the government of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, while the New Komeito did not want to delay a conclusion of the issue ahead of the House of Councillors election next year. The two parties were motivated by the same desire to come up with the amendments to the Basic Education Law. By playing up their unity, the two parties also aimed to rattle the main opposition party Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan), led by Ichiro Ozawa.

The LDP suggested describing patriotism as "loving the country" (kuni o ai suru), while the New Komeito insisted that the definition of the word should be "cherishing the country" (kuni o taisetsu ni suru). Conservative members of the LDP were increasingly frustrated with the party making excessive concessions in discussions on the amendments to the education law. Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe, whom conservative lawmakers support, remarked in a strong tone:

"We say, 'Let's use pencils and erasers sparingly (taisetsu ni suru), but we don't say, 'Let's love pencils and erasers' (ai suru), just as we don't say taisetsu ni suru when talking about the country."

Abe conferred on the patriotism issue with former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, a leader of the education zoku (clique) in the Diet. Mori advised him, "You should not make an easy compromise." The LDP leadership's real intention is, however, that such a big job should be resolved under the Koizumi government. Amid attention being fixed on Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan),

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which recently elected Ichiro Ozawa party president, the LDP has to show its intention to submit a bill amending the education law in order also to strengthen its own cohesiveness.

The view in the LDP leadership was that some compromises were unavoidable in order to realize an early submission of the bill to the Diet. A senior Diet Affairs Committee member commented: "We focused excessively on language. Even if expressions are changed, the education system will not change."

Tadamori Oshima, chair of a panel concerning amendments to the law, on April 12 proposed a definition of patriotism that included the wording requested by both the LDP and New Komeito: "respecting tradition and culture, loving the country and homeland, respecting other countries, and contributing to the peace and prosperity of the international community." He presented this proposal with an eye to the New Komeito and the situation in the LDP.

A junior member of the education zoku in the Diet made this comment on Oshima's proposal, "The LDP will probably accept it, but I don't think the expressions are appropriate for the Basic Education Law."

The New Komeito does not want to delay a conclusion any further in order to avoid a negative impact on the next Upper House election. The panel held its 68th meeting on April 12. Panel members thought that it was not wise to give the impression that they were prolonging the discussion on patriotism. One member enthusiastically said, "Since we formulated the proposals, we want the government to submit a bill to the current Diet session and pass it through the Diet."

(2) Minshuto's tactic of absenting itself from Diet deliberations

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)
April 13, 2006

With Ichiro Ozawa's assumption of the presidency in the Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto), signs of change have begun to appear in the pattern of confrontation between the ruling and opposition parties during the latter half of the current Diet

session. The party yesterday boycotted deliberations of the House of Representatives' Health and Labor Committee, underscoring a confrontational stance toward the ruling camp. Meanwhile, the ruling bloc is stepping up efforts to strengthen solidarity within the party.

Signs of shift to strong attitude - Minshuto

In the absence of Minshuto, the ruling parties and the Japanese Communist Party started deliberations on medical system reform legislation in yesterday's Health and Labor Committee meeting. Minshuto boycotted the session, claiming: "Prospects for starting discussion on a basic cancer policy bill submitted by our party are nowhere in sight."

Ozawa-led Minshuto will review former head Seiji Maehara's stance of "not refusing deliberations." In the first half of the Diet session, the largest opposition party was pressed to fight a defensive battle over a bogus e-mail scandal. The party is now determined to turn the tables.

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Minshuto decided to boycott the meeting yesterday not under Ozawa's instruction but based on a decision by Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Kozo Watanabe and others. Receiving a report from Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama, Ozawa told Hatoyama: "An explanation is necessary." Watanabe urgently held a press conference and said: "We have no intention of taking this kind of approach in other committee meetings."

The party's strong attitude reflects elated feelings among Minshuto members in the wake of the assumption of Ozawa as party presidency. A senior member of the Diet Affairs Committee indicated a willingness to craft a Diet strategy based on public opinion, saying: "We must not allow the ruling coalition to regard us with contempt."

Minshuto is ready to present a counterproposal to the government's administrative reform bills during today's Diet session. Ozawa reiterated in a meeting of the next cabinet yesterday: "I do not necessarily deny the stance of presenting counterproposals. Of importance are their contents. The public expects us to show differences from the ruling camp."

Efforts to speed up enactment of bills - LDP

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi told Secretary General Tsutomu Takebe at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday: "There are a host of bills on the Diet agenda. I want you to make efforts on a priority basis to have the bills enacted in coordination with the New Komeito."

Tension is mounting in the ruling parties. A senior member of the Diet Affairs Committee said in response to Minshuto's boycott yesterday: "What the party has said is so inconsistent that it will be impossible for the party to obtain public understanding. There are no parts on which we make concessions." The ruling camp, though, needs to prevent the largest opposition party from taking advantage of a lack of unity in the ruling camp and disturbing it.

In view of the number of remaining days of the current Diet session, the ruling parties aimed to lay down a bill amending the Fundamental Law of Education around this time. It is true, though, that Ozawa's assumption of office as Minshuto president also contributed to speeding up an agreement on revising the law in the ruling camp. The government plans to submit the bill to the Diet within April and have it enacted at an early date. It is considering establishing a special committee on this issue.

The ruling side is determined to have the administrative reform promotion bill passed in the Lower House next week. In its Research Commission on the Constitution meeting yesterday, the LDP left the task of dealing with referendum legislation in the hands of Policy Research Council Chairman Hidenao Nakagawa. The

party will discuss a future response possibly next week.

A senior LDP Diet Affairs Committee member said: "If we submit the bill amending the Fundamental Law of Education and other bills to the Diet, it will unavoidably become necessary to extend the session for a lengthy period." On the Diet extension, difficult negotiations are expected because it will be linked to the LDP presidential election in September.

(3) Futenma relocation agreement (Part A): Locals perplexed by V-TOKYO 00002041 004 OF 012

shaped runway plan

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Pp.24-25) (Abridged)
April 14, 2006

On April 13, Sakae Toyama, 65, was alone in an anti-base tent in Okinawa's Henoko district overlooking the shining sea, looking a little annoyed. Earlier in the day, news organizations reported that Gov. Keiichi Inamine, who had been adamant about not accepting any plans other than the original Camp Schwab offshore plan, might go along with a revised plan.

Toyama commented:

"I know that tremendous pressure from both the central government and the prefectural assembly is killing the governor. But he has to hang in there at least until the gubernatorial election in November. If he can hold on till then, we will pick someone who is stronger and does not give in to pressure as our new governor. Inamine has to withstand the pressure until November."

On April 7, an agreement was reached between Nago Mayor Yoshikazu Shimabukuro and Defense Agency Director General Fukushima Nukaga on a plan to construct two runways in a V shape at the coastline of Camp Schwab. To many local residents, it was a bolt from the blue.

Toyama complained:

"They have come up with such an awkward plan. It is designed just to remove the flight paths from residential areas, disregarding noise and other hazardous factors. One-third of training at Futenma is devoted to touch and go. The mayor said that such training wouldn't be conducted at the new site. I asked the deputy mayor if that was true, but he reiterated, 'We will discuss specifics later on.'"

On April 11, over 500 anti-base residents assembled together at the plaza in front of the Nago municipal government office and submitted a letter of protest, demanding Mayor Shimabukuro retract his statement tolerant of the Futenma relocation.

Zenko Nakamura, 58, head of a citizens group opposing the heliport base, noted:

"In the 1997 Nago plebiscite, residents said 'no' to the heliport base. Futenma Air Station must be moved out of Okinawa or even out of Japan."

Anti-base group preparing to recall Shimabukuro

Opponents of the base relocation reportedly overwhelmed base-supporters in subsequent opinion polls. What is pushing the municipal government in the other direction?

Nakamura explained this way:

"To begin with, it is the central government's policy to maintain the US-Japan Security Treaty. The government doesn't hesitate to get rid of local heads not following this policy. As a result, local heads do anything to achieve goals. Citizens and the mayor are all aware that it's absolutely ridiculous to build a base at a place like this. But the mayor has no other option but to

follow the government's decision. That's been the way in Okinawa for the last 60 postwar years."

A 55-year-old male taxi driver commented in a low voice:

"Many of those opposing the relocation are civil servants, including town office workers and teachers. The chamber of commerce and industry and local business operators are hopeful of receiving local economy revitalization measures in return for accepting the base. As you know, Nago has been losing its vigor."

The government has poured 60 billion yen into the northern part of Okinawa since the heliport base relocation has surfaced.

Toyama also said:

"Even if the city formally accepted the relocation, it would take five, six years to actually begin construction. We will block construction at all costs. We will find a strong candidate and then recall the mayor."

(4) Never back down: ex-Nago mayor

ASAHI (Page 35) (Full)
April 13, 2006

Japan and the United States agreed 10 years ago yesterday on the relocation and return of Futenma airfield, a US military base located in Japan's southernmost island prefecture of Okinawa. Tokyo, Washington, and Okinawa have had their respective expectations diverge over the airfield's relocation. Tateo Kishimoto, the then mayor of Nago City in Okinawa Prefecture, clarified his acceptance of the government's proposal to build an alternative facility in the island's northern coastal city of Nago to take over the airfield's heliport functions. Kishimoto was on the front of negotiations for eight years over Futenma relocation, and he died a month after retiring from the city's mayoralty. Three days before his death, the late mayor left these words with the city's new mayor: "Never back down."

Kishimoto died on March 27 from hepatocyte cancer. He was 62. On April 2, Nago City held a municipal funeral for him, with about 4,000 people attending. Among them was Zenko Nakamura, 58, leader of a local anti-heliport group.

"Mayor Kishimoto and I were in different positions," Nakamura said, "but we were both alike in being at the mercy of national policy."

In his younger days, Kishimoto was against the presence of US military bases on the island. In 1973, Kishimoto became an employee of the city's municipal government office. At the time, his quest was to make his local community culturally and ecologically rich. His initiative was just the opposite of the current trend in Japan of a widening of economic disparities. "He was always thinking over what we could do by ourselves to develop our communities," says Masatoshi Shimabukuro, 62, who teamed up with Kishimoto to that end in those days and who once worked as a chief librarian of Nago City.

In 1997, Nago was suddenly called on to host another US military base. The Japanese government came up with a plan to build a sea-based heliport in waters off the coast of Henoko in the city as a

replacement for the Futenma airfield. That year, the city polled its residents over whether to accept Tokyo's offshore heliport plan. A majority of those who cast their votes rejected it. However, the then mayor, Tetsuya Higa, accepted the heliport plan. Shortly thereafter, he resigned as mayor.

Kishimoto won the race to be Higa's successor as mayor. In the eyes of antibase locals, Kishimoto appeared to have changed

sides, however.

Higa said, "The base won't go away if we only ask them to return it." The former mayor added: "I hope we can make a change for the better. The mayor should have his back against the wall."

In December 1999, Kishimoto clarified his intention to accept Futenma relocation to Nago.

The Defense Agency, which later entered into negotiations with Kishimoto, found the mayor a "tough" counterpart. Kishimoto won a government package of local economic stimulus measures for Okinawa's northern districts to the extent of 100 billion yen for 10 years. He continued to negotiate Futenma's relocation with the government for years, setting preconditions for his acceptance of the Futenma relocation plan.

However, Yukio Okamoto, a one-time special assistant to the prime minister for Okinawa and later a frequent adviser to Kishimoto, took a different view. "He never gave in (to the government) when it came to anything in the interests of Okinawa's northern localities and also when it came to base-caused noise damage to local communities," Okamoto recalled.

Masatoshi Shimabukuro called on Mayor Kishimoto at his office from time to time. Shimabukuro remembers Kishimoto saying there over Okinawa's traditional awamori spirits: "Masatoshi, never stop the antibase movement."

As the city's mayor, Kishimoto refused to meet base opponents. In the meantime, the government and local conservative assembly members had yet to place full confidence in him.

Katsuhiro Yoshida was also the head of a municipality in the island's northern part. Yoshida once served as Kin Town's mayor. He remembers that there was alcohol on Kishimoto's breath in one morning when he was in a meeting with cabinet ministers.

The government will do anything or whatsoever until I say yes. Once I give in, the government will press me hard... With this, Yoshida, who also accepted a US military telecom facility's relocation to his town, recalled how it was in his negotiations with the government. Kishimoto shouldered the heavy burden of a base, which was imposed from Tokyo to Okinawa and from Okinawa to Nago while he was in office for eight years. He might have felt lonely but could not tell anyone...

In January this year, Nago elected its new mayor after Kishimoto retired for his health. On March 24, the city's newly elected mayor, Yoshikazu Shimabukuro, visited Kishimoto at his hospital. Kishimoto there said to Shimabukuro: "Never back down."

Two weeks later, Mayor Shimabukuro agreed on the government's plan to build two airstrips at a site across the cape of Henoko in his city.

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The city's deputy mayor and other municipal officials are on the road to meet local residents in order to account for the agreement reached between Nago and Tokyo. The city government held another briefing of local communities yesterday. The new mayor, now shouldering the same heavy burden as Kishimoto's, has yet to show up before his city's people.

(5) 6-trillion-yen MD initiative: Naoki Akiyama, who calls himself "broker," has JDA Director-General Nukaga and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries wrapped around his finger

SHUKAN BUNSHUN (Excerpts)
April 13, 2006

The Japan-US Security Strategy Conference has been held twice a year - once in Washington in May and once in Tokyo in November - since 2003, but its existence is little known in Japan. This conference, however, is attended by eminent people.

A political reporter at a national newspaper explained:

"Attending the conference from Japan are members of the National Security Research Group, an organization composed of lawmakers working for national defense or defense-related industries, known as the kokubo zoku, from the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the New Komeito, and Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan). The chairman of the group is former JDA Director-General Tsutomu Kawara, the vice chairman is LDP General Council Chairman Fumio Kyuma, and the chief of the secretariat is JDA Director-General Fukushima Nukaga. Besides them are Shigeru Ishiba and Tokuichiro Tamazawa, who have each served as JDA director-general, and other renowned legislators."

Participants in the same conference from the United States are all key government officials, including Secretary of Defense Ronald Rumsfeld, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense Richard Lawless, former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, and former Secretary of Defense William Cohen.

Given that in addition to key political figures, executives of leading defense manufacturers from around the world, such as Lockheed Martin and Boeing, attend the conference, it may be safe to call the conference a military-industrial gathering.

The sponsor of this grand-scale gathering is Naoki Akiyama, a member of the board of directors of the Japan-America Cultural Society, a public corporation under the Foreign Ministry's control. Akiyama also serves as head of the National Security Research Institute, which is affiliated with the society.

"He (Akiyama) is a liaison in the defense area for Japan-US exchanges. He seems to be on friendly terms with Mr. Nukaga and Mr. Kyuma among Japan's defense lobbyists. He also has friendly ties with senior US government officials. He brags that he knows all about Armitage's connections with Japan and that he is particularly close to Rumsfeld. He has given the impression that he thinks Japan-US security issues cannot make progress without his advice," said a major newspaper correspondent in Washington.

Last May, when JDA Director-General Nukaga, Kyuma, Taro Aso, and others from Japan were visiting the United States, a senior US Department of Defense official hosted a reception. "On that

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occasion," the same correspondent revealed, "Mr. Akiyama interrupted a conversation between Secretary Rumsfeld and Director-General Nukaga and led Nukaga out of the reception hall, saying, 'The schedule is tight.' Secretary Rumsfeld reportedly exploded, 'What's that? Who's that?' and 'I don't want to see him again.'"

According to a book he authored, Shin-Kaso Tekikoku (A New Potential Enemy), Akiyama was born in 1943. He learned from political commentator Isamu Togawa and received ideas about the nature of the state from former Nissho Iwai Vice President Hachiro Kaifu.

A Foreign Ministry official gave this account of Akiyama: "I've heard his father was a prosecutor and later was involved in founding the National Police Reserve (the predecessor of the Self-Defense Forces)."

When Japanese lawmakers are visiting the US, Akiyama brings them to bigwigs in the US administration or offers an inspection tour of the military industry.

"Director-General Nukaga and Mr. Kyuma appear to completely trust Mr. Akiyama. Mr. Akiyama assembled 15 correspondents assigned to Washington and hosted meetings with Nukaga at beef barbecue or Chinese restaurants. The expenses for these meetings were paid by Mr. Akiyama with his platinum American Express card. So I thought he had plenty of money," another national newspaper company reporter said.

Mitsubishi Corp. is a subcontractor of "my firm"

Except for the Japan-US Security Strategy Conference, politicians and defense industry executives from Japan and the US have very few opportunities to meet. Chiefly for this reason, participants in the conference tend to expect a lot from Akiyama.

"During the conference," said a military journalist, "Japanese and US legislators working for the defense industry clamor for Japan to ease its three principles of weapons exports. They do so, reflecting their respective defense industries' desires. American firms aim to sell Japan missile defense systems, including the Patriot Advanced Capability (PAC-3) missile, while Japanese trading houses and defense firms like Mitsubishi Heavy Industries will first buy such systems from (US firms) and then aim to produce them under license."

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries has been at the top of Japan's defense industry for many years. It is a large supplier for the JDA, receiving procurement orders worth at least 250 billion yen every year. Mitsubishi Corp. acts as a weapons importer, and Mitsubishi Electric dominates such areas as radar technology used for satellites. One-third of Japan's defense budget goes the Mitsubishi group.

Once the MD initiative is implemented and the three principles of weapons exports are eased, the Mitsubishi group will be able to achieve an astronomical level of profit.

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Chairman Takashi Nishioka has attended the Japan-US Security Strategy Conference as a panelist since 2003 and delivered a keynote speech at the conference both in 2004 and 2005, demonstrating his enthusiasm for the

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conference.

"Chairman Nishioka has trusts Mr. Akiyama all the more because he was introduced by Mr. Akiyama to heavyweights in the US government and the US defense industry. Mr. Nishioka appears to have played golf together with Mr. Akiyama," said a participant of the conference.

In March 2005, one national newspaper reporter for defense affairs said, "Shakai Shimpō, the official publication of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), reported that executives of the Mitsubishi group, including Chairman Nishioka, assisted by Akiyama, 'secretly entertained' former JDA Director-General Ishiba and defense bureaucrats."

His extensive personal networks in Japan and the US and the way he orchestrated an opulent reception in Washington are sufficient for people to call him a fixer.

Akiyama leads the National Security Research Institute, and in addition, he effectively runs a company called Advac International Corporation.

Last year, a former Advac employee we will call "Ms. A" filed a lawsuit against Advac for unpaid salary. This February, the Tokyo District Court upheld Ms. A's claim and ordered Advac to pay her unpaid salary. The records of the case include her testimony as to what Akiyama said and how he behaved at the National Security Research Institute.

According to the records, Akiyama described Mitsubishi Corporation as a "subcontractor" of his company. He believes himself to be a "fixer" with strong clout in the JDA over its procurement orders to private firms.

But problems about his activities were raised in a way he had never anticipated. A journalist for national defense explained:

"The Japan-America Cultural Society, the parent body of Mr. Akiyama's Institute, has been provided a total of 38 million yen in subsidies by the Japan Foundation from 1997 through 2004.

Those named in the board of directors of that society include national defense lobbyist lawmakers mentioned earlier here in this piece and executives of domestic defense-related firms. The society was launched with the aim of cultural exchanges between Japan and the US. This means that the society is not at all an occasion to deal with security issues and military affairs. Additionally, the Japan Foundation is an independent administrative organization under the control of the Foreign Ministry. Reporting that the society has used public money given as subsidies for other purposes, the news media took issue with this point."

Various questions were also raised about Akiyama's background and activities.

The same journalist continued: "Akiyama has let it be known that his political activities started with his serving as secretary to Tsutomu Kawara. I then asked Mr. Kawara's secretary at the time,

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but the secretary said that he did not know him."

Although Akiyama has portrayed himself as a close friend of former US Secretary of Defense William Cohen, a senior member of

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the Cohen group, when asked about Akiyama, made this reply: "With Japan's defense lobby lawmakers standing behind him, he (Akiyama) was able to pose as a power broker. He was seen bragging to Japanese visitors to the US that he was really close to Cohen, but that claim was met with laughter here."

This magazine asked lawmakers belonging to the National Security Research Group whether they knew of Akiyama's past activities and the suspicions that surround him. LDP Secretary General Takebe, House of Representatives member Tamisuke Watanuki, and former Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) President Maehara simply repeated these words: "I didn't know," and "I'm surprised." Former JDA Director-General Tsutomu Kawara denied the fact that Akiyama had served as secretary to him.

JDA Director-General Nukaga, when asked the same question by this weekly at Haneda Airport after coming back from Okinawa, made only this remark: "I don't know." He quickly got in a car waiting for him. Since then he has shown no signs of responding to interviews about this matter.

Former JDA Director-General Ishiba, asked about Akiyama's past, said, "I didn't know," adding: "Mr. Kawara, Mr. Kyuma, and Mr. Nukaga are people we all respect. So, don't you think it is strange if we ask them, 'Isn't there any problem with him?'"

Apparently, the major factor that helped Akiyama to build his personal network in the US was his connections with heavyweight Japanese lawmakers. And the reason why he was able to expand his personal network with Japanese lawmakers was because he happened to have an acquaintance with veteran lawmakers. Well, from where did he cultivate his personal network? One acquaintance of Akiyama's explained:

"Akiyama worked as a driver for Isamu Togawa. Akiyama joined Togawa when he visited the Foreign Ministry. In doing so, Akiyama had opportunities to be friends with politicians, like Ichiro Ozawa. Later, he began associating with defense lobbyist lawmakers."

Akiyama's golf companion, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Chairman Takashi Nishioka, who last July assumed the post as the officer responsible for his company's missile work and is also director of the Japan-America Cultural Society, is reluctant to mention the suspicions now surrounding Akiyama:

"I didn't know Mr. Akiyama was doing such things. Whether he committed fraud or not has nothing to do with me. The membership fee of the Japan-US Security Strategy Institute? I don't think (my company) pays it."

However, a public relations officer at Mitsubishi Heavy Industries said:

"As a leading manufacturer in the aerial and space defense sectors, we agreed with the purposes of the talks and took part in them. In addition to the payment of 1 million yen a year as support money, our company paid 600,000 yen to take part in an American tour last spring. We paid the money not to Mr. Akiyama's Security Strategic Institute but to the talks, even though the recipient is the institute."

A series of scandals involving (the JDA) in recent years has

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strengthened calls for greater transparency in how the defense budget is used, but the MD initiative, in which as much as 6 trillion yen will be invested, is still covered in darkness.

(6) Future course of Food Safety Commission - Interview with Kiyotoshi Kaneko, professor of neurophysiology at Tokyo Medical College: Framework that allows manipulation of reports open to question

ASAHI (Page 15) (Full)
April 14, 2006

I have no intention to avoid my responsibility for the contents of the reports worked out (by the Food Safety Commissions (FSC)). I left the panel because I want to work hard at my main job, and not out of protest. I want to stress that the advisory panel must take a logical and scientifically appropriate stance in order to assess risks on a scientific basis.

If there are problems in the panel itself, the credibility of its reports will be undermined. The current framework that allows the manipulation of reports must be rectified.

The panel called on the government to assess the BSE risk of US beef, not the safety-management system, attaching these conditions: (1) Specified risk materials, including vertebral columns, should be completely removed in the US; and (2) imported beef should be limited to that from calves considered at low risk of contracting the disease.

It was hard for me to understand the (government's) stance of asking the FSC to make a scientific assessment while setting aside the important point of risk management. The report (released in December of last year) inserted the passage "scientific assessment is difficult." That was intended to express our concerns or apprehension from the standpoint of scientists. However, the panel gave approval "as a result of study from a scientific viewpoint." I feel this was regrettable.

One month later, the government imposed a second ban on US beef imports in reaction to the discovery of vertebral columns found in a US beef shipment to Japan. Is it enough to pursue the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare (MHLW), and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF) on their responsibility?

If the FSC is willing to conduct food safety assessment in a serious manner, the panel should be given the right to make the government resubmit a list of inquiries if it finds questionable points. Otherwise, it will be impossible to make a scientific assessment.

The FSC has flown the slogans of "scientific assessment" and "fair, neutral, and independent inspection," but this comes in the face of real society. There naturally are time limitations, and much remains unknown. Despite such circumstances, the panel must come up with assessment results.

It is necessary to obtain a national consensus on standards for scientific assessment. Japanese people have little experience in risk analysis, so they tend to call for "zero risk." But a

certain level of risk has to be tolerated.

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Even if safety is verified scientifically, changes can always occur, so there is some latitude. The government should reveal the possible risk and then make a judgment. Or it should listen to public views and then take measures. If no standards are prepared, the public will expect the risk to be as small as possible, and then the issue of safety becomes a matter of making people feel comfortable.

I keenly feel that experts on risk analysis should also join the process of confirming food safety. Should they make a scientific assessment from a different angle, our awareness of risk will deepen. One idea would be to bring together experts in specific areas. If they set standards on what should be regarded as a risk, it will become possible for each section of the FSC to have "common scales."

In the event such criteria were adopted, the FSC would be able to disclose information on risk. If the people demand that risk should be minimized, it will become possible for the panel to pose questions about cost increases, and both sides will be able to exchange views on risk.

Nonetheless, even if the FSC emphasizes safety, it will be vital to convince the people. In order to win public trust, it is necessary to strengthen the risk-communication system among the FSC, the MHLW, and MAFF.

For instance, it would be desirable to set up such a risk-communication body as a food security committee involving relevant government agencies and disclose information on risk assessment and management. The public will become more trustful (of the FSC) through such efforts.

SCHIEFFER